

# Professional Learning Communities

A **Professional Learning Community** is a **cohort** of educators **working together** to improve the **achievement** of a group of students. Conducting regularly scheduled meetings, the cohort **uses data**, student work and their skills and knowledge collaboratively to ensure each student meets the standards the team is expected to teach. These meetings are guided by clear expectations, group norms and protocols to ensure the team will **“KNOW, TEACH and ASSESS”** the COMMON CORE STANDARDS and/or the KENTUCKY CORE CONTENT. When the team teaches the standard and assesses the standards at the appropriate level of rigor, the team has “goal clarity.” The PLC **sets measurable student achievement goals** and creates strategic plans to achieve the defined goals they do the following:

- **Plan Together** (all teach toward the same standards at the appropriate level of rigor)
- **Implement Together** (teach the same standards **at the same time or align toward the same outcomes**)
- **Assess Together** (use **common assessments** to check who has mastered or who is mastering the standard and who isn’t)
- **Analyze Together** (look at the data their assessment produces to determine who is not above the proficiency line and what content still needs to be learned.
- **Intervene Together** (collaborate to create plans that intervene for the kids who have not mastered the standard and provide “extensions” for students who mastered it but could be challenged to even higher level of performance)
- **Celebrate Together** (**monitor** the **progress** and celebrate when the students meet the goals/benchmarks)

Successful PLC’s are...	Successful PLCs ARE NOT...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Powered by teachers</li> <li>• Focused on Achievement and the formative and summative data</li> <li>• Taking advantage of everyone’s strengths</li> <li>• Motivated by learning outcomes for students</li> <li>• Open and honest, particularly about the student work data</li> <li>• Consistent</li> <li>• Using protocols to make sure the meeting is meaningful and productive in terms of improving student achievement</li> <li>• Continuously returning to their data based goals</li> <li>• Flexible to meet the needs of students</li> <li>• Collaborative problem solving models</li> <li>• Shared ownership and accountability for student achievement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programs</li> <li>• “Something extra to do”</li> <li>• Voluntary</li> <li>• About technical things like field trips and fundraisers</li> <li>• The leader doing all the work</li> <li>• A place to complain about individual students</li> <li>• Free from disagreement</li> <li>• Quiet</li> <li>• So competitive people refuse to share successful strategies</li> <li>• Emails</li> <li>• Free from structures and protocols</li> <li>• Frozen when they fail (they <b>“fail forward”</b>).</li> </ul>

Teachers in PLCs work together to know the standards, teach the standards, assess the standards, examine the results, and develop a system and strategies to intervene for the students who have not met the standard. This means they have the same answers for a few important questions:

1. What do we teach?
2. How do we teach it?
3. How do we know they are learning it?
4. What do we do for a student who doesn't learn it?
5. What do we do for those who already know it?

### *How PLCs Use DATA to Close Achievement Gaps*

According to a 2004 study, teachers who **Close Achievement Gaps** are more likely to...

- Use **DATA** to determine who is on the other side of the proficiency line
- **Frequently assess** students with both formative and summative assessments
- **Analyze student data** and seek professional development for data identified needs
- **Link performance, particularly low performance, to the instructional strategy they used rather than to the student**
- Have **leaders** (principals, PLC leaders, colleagues, etc.) who value data use as a way to monitor individual student learning
- Discuss data constantly in PLCs or embedded professional development
- **Visit classrooms** of other teachers who are getting better data results in specific areas
- When asked **what closes the achievement gap**, discuss student assessment data and recommend all teachers use data to **differentiate** for each student.

(Bay Area School Reform Collaborative Study; August 2004)

### **TEACHERS and ADMINISTRATORS**

Teachers	Administrators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborate</li> <li>• Make it about data and intervening on a regular basis</li> <li>• Have Goal Clarity—ensure the standard is known, taught and assessed (and LEARNED)</li> <li>• Work through difficulties, particularly the different definitions of quality work and rigor—align your work so it looks like the work in released items</li> <li>• Be on time and fully participate</li> <li>• Have a “tolerance for truth” regarding data</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure there is protected and intentional TIME set aside for this work in the schedule</li> <li>• Hold people accountable for full participation and meeting their obligation</li> <li>• Remove obstacles to the work</li> <li>• Make learning the outcome—not compliance</li> <li>• Recognize there are differences in how teams look—and there are differences between High School, Middle School and Elementary School PLCs.</li> </ul>